

Nightmares of the Soul

by Nightmares of the Soul

Category: Final Fantasy VII

Genre: Drama

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-06-25 09:00:00

Updated: 2001-02-03 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 21:14:12

Rating: T

Chapters: 5

Words: 15,477

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Beginning of a new series...what happens when two lost souls from the past meet two from the present?

1. Prologue

Nightmares of the Soul: Prologue

Nightmares of the Soul

A fanfic by Iridal & Kaitou

* * *

> <p> Prologue: Wounded Souls

We had lain quiet for centuries. Each of us knew the other was there, but it was like a faint glimmer in our subconscious. Every so often, faintly, we could touch one another's minds - we could feel what they felt, and communicate for a brief while. Did we once have names? Each century took more of our memories from us. We drifted through the Lifestream, victims of the evil of Jenova and barely aware of its rampage through the world we were so violently ripped from so long ago.

Every once and awhile, we'd receive flashes of the events of the living world, brief snippets of the clash between good and evil that only served to frustrate us as we could do nothing to effect it in our drifting state of consciousness. But in the end, we'd resign ourselves to the lonely state of drifting and the longing to rejoin the fight against Jenova.

Finally, something shook our world. Everything we knew was turned backwards and inside out...and we were flung back into the world that had killed us.

* * *

> <p> The time since the defeat of Jenova had passed swiftly, and the companions who had brought about its downfall settled quickly back into the lifestyles they had left behind. Their lives were by no means easy, especially since they were hailed as heroes upon hearing of the final battle with the evil entity and its champion Sephiroth, but it was filled with contentment for each of them. <p>

Each of them...except one. Vincent Valentine.

Life following the battle was not quite so happy for the dark ex-Turk. He had no home or family to return to, no job that he had left to go back to, no newfound love to spend his time with. Being in the presence of his friends Cloud and Tifa only served as a painful reminder of what he had lost due to Jenova.

Lucrecia...

Instead, he had brooded, avoiding his friends and thinking of what might have been. Two long months of soul searching had passed, and Vincent finally decided to lay his love to rest. Though he dismissed the notion of ever finding love again, let alone one as true as hers, he knew that he had to visit Lucrecia once more, if only to gain enough peace to find some happiness in his life.

When Cloud went to check on him the next day, Vincent was gone. He had left as silently as the night, taking only his weapon and materia with him.

* * *

> <p> Vincent arrived at his beloved's cave at nightfall a few days later. Nothing had changed since when he had last visited - the air still carried the same aura of heartbreaking sadness, the atmosphere still as somber as when he had left. <p>

He knelt before the dais that Lucrecia had been on to give her last gifts to him. With a deep breath, he prepared to pour out his innermost feelings to his one and only love, and he prayed to whatever power above that she might hear it from _wherever_ she may be now.

He talked for about an hour, about anything and everything that had been on his mind for so long. He told her of how he loved her, of how he had fought the monster her son had become for her sake...and of how miserable he had been in the thirty one years since she had chosen to carry another man's child instead of his.

"My love, I can't live in the past any more." He paused. "I still love you, Lucrecia. I don't think there can ever be another. But... I've lived in the past wallowing in my own sorrow for too long...how sad you must have been that I've carried my guilt all this time."

.....Vincent.....find happiness.....

He thought it was just a trick of his ears, but he swore he heard her sweet voice once more. He strained his sensitive ears for a brief moment, then continued. He could not help but think that instead of sharing his feelings, he was asking for her permission. Shaking his

head, Vincent gamely went on.

"Lucrecia...I want you to know that since you've found such peace finally, I think it is time that I actually live myself for once, instead of just existing."

Vincent sat a moment longer, simply taking in the last vestiges of his beloved's lingering spirit. He stood to leave, whispering a farewell.

****THUD!!!****

He definately heard that...there was no mistaking the sound of something crashing to the ground just outside the cave's entrance. The ex-Turk ran out to investigate who, or what, might dare to intrude on him, when he nearly tripped over the fallen object. Vincent knelt to examine it, his eyes widened ever so slightly with surprise.

It was...a woman.

* * *

> <p> He sat, as he had for the past two months, quietly contemplating his life of the past five years. So much wasted. Time he could have been enjoying the beautiful things in life - friends, love...happiness. He could not ever remember being happy...perhaps, maybe for the small time when he had believed that he was normal. Before it all began. Before Nibelheim. Before JENOVA. He shook his head and slowly pulled himself up, walking toward the small pool of water at the center of his room. <p>

He splashed his face with the clear water, which was purified by the amounts of Mako running through the Northern Crater. When the water stilled, he studied his reflection, for the probably thousandth time. His silver waist-length hair was tied back, as he often wore it now. Without his trenchcoat, the muscles in his broad shoulders were exposed, defined by his years of perfecting the art of war. He studied this picture with his shimmering green eyes. He looked the same as he always had; yet something was different. The past five years had been centered on his desire to control the world. Now, he had accepted himself as human. Sighing, he asked himself, _Will I ever find happiness? Will someone ever look at me with...love?_ Suddenly, a sharp cry and noise from the top of the crater jerked him from his reverie. It sounded like a traveler had gotten into a scuffle with one of the many monsters roaming the Crater.

Donning his trenchcoat and picking up his beloved Masamune, the man known as Sephiroth made his way to help.

* * *

> <p> He arrived just as the traveler in question drew his sword and swung at the wolves surrounding him. He was swathed in leather clothing and a cape, completely obscuring face and body. However, the numerous bloodstains on the clothes told Sephiroth all he needed to know. Closing his eyes and muttering a spell, he cast Sleep on the wearied and outnumbered combatant. As he fell, the wolves moved in for their kill...but met Masamune instead. <p>

When he had dispatched all of the threats, Sephiroth turned and carefully picked up the warrior. _He's so light..._ He hefted the young man's bag and sword over his back and proceeded back to his home.

Once arrived, he gently placed the traveler on his small pallet of furs and then set down Masamune and the bag. Pausing, he studied the other's broadsword. It was close to four-and-a-half feet in length, and was of tempered steel. The hilt was inset with a single ruby that had the shape of a dragon carved into it. Along the blade itself there were numerous rune symbols, as well as another dragon etched into the blade. _This is craftsmanship such as I have never seen..._ He placed the sword next to Masamune and turned to care for his unexpected guest.

He carefully removed the belt from around the boy's waist, noting with a smile the numerous small throwing knives concealed in the inner part of it. This done, he gently and slightly lifted the body to pull off the cape, which revealed yet another small arsenal. As he lifted one of the smaller daggers away, he noticed the materia glistening in the hilt. Momentarily using his supernatural abilities, he probed the materia to find its use, and was stunned by the sheer enormosity of its power. _This is raw materia...and not from around here either..._ Resuming his task, he began to carefully unwrap the scarf that was wrapped around the face of his guest.

The cloth dropped to the floor. With a sharp intake of breath, Sephiroth realized...this was a woman.

She was clad in mostly dark brown. She wore long brown leather pants that laced up the side, and through the open lacings one could see that her boots went up to just past her knees. On either arm, she had gauntlets of leather, embedded with metal studs that ran up past her elbow and then laced up. She wore a leather vest that also tied up the front, and underneath it, a short tunic-style shirt. Around her waist was a silver-studded belt in which rested a beautiful and lethal-looking dagger. She had well-defined muscles, and obviously was a warrior. With surprise, Sephiroth noted that she had to be at least six feet tall. When he had removed the scarf, her hair had freely tumbled out. It was long, and an auburn color. It had tousled-looking curls, and on either side of her face, there were two thin braids. She was pale, nearly a perfect white, and her closed eyes were fringed by long lashes. Her eyebrows were knitted together in a slightly worried look, even in sleep, as if she expected at any moment, a disaster.

Sephiroth rose, and pulled a blanket over the girl. He then sat by the small bed, waiting for her to wake.

* * *

> <p> Vincent could not help but stare at the unconscious woman laying on the rocky ground before him. The only way to reach Lucrecia's cave was by Chocobo, and she obviously wasn't here before he arrived...yet how did she get here? He shook his head as if to clear his thoughts. Whatever did happen, his pondering could wait until he checked to see if she was alright.

It was only until after Vincent had carried her into the shelter of the cave when he could truly examine her. Ever cautious of the

possibility of her actually being of an evil bent or perhaps reacting badly to his..._unique_ appearance, he had patted her down for hidden weapons and materia...and was astounded at the sheer number of knives hidden on her person. He had found somewhere around seven - in both her boots, on her belt, one was even hidden up her sleeve and was tied to a catch that would release when she flexed her arm a certain way - and each was equipped with powerful materia.

Seeing that she'd still be out for a little while longer, he sat back to examine his 'intruder.' Vincent had to admit, she was beautiful. She was dressed entirely in black - a black linen shirt covered by a black vest embroidered in purple, black leather pants, and black riding boots. Her long silvery hair was caught in a complex looking plait, with pale curls wisping over her fair brow. Some disturbing stray thought seemed to be passing through her sleeping mind, as her winsome face was marred by a pained frown. He found himself resisting the irrational urge to brush away a stray lock of pale hair to sooth her restless thoughts. Instead, he sat back with Death Penalty close by, content to patiently wait for her to stir.

* * *

> <p> ...Charis...?
 ...who's there?!?
> ...Charis! Thank the Gods I'm not alone!!
 ...Gwynhwyfar? Is that you?
> Yes, it is me. What happened to us?
 ...I don't remember anything except.....oh gods...
> The Final battle...

> JENOVA is to blame for that, not you my friend.
 Where are you? I can't see you! Its so...cold...
> We are no longer in the Lifestream...that I know. But you are so far from me...
 I can feel that. It is like part of me...isn't here._

After having been linked for so long in the timelessness of the Lifestream, the two presences were painfully aware of the absence of the other. In desperation, they reached out to one another, but felt themselves slipping ever further from each other's grasp.

_GWYN!!!!

> Something's pulling me...pulling me away!
 DON'T LEAVE ME! PLEASE!!!
> I can't stop it!!

The desperate girl made one last attempt to grab her friend, but missed. They both felt themselves spiraling helplessly to consciousness and the pain associated with it...away from each other.

* * *

> <p> As much as she struggled to maintain her contact with Charis, Gwyn could feel her awareness slipping more and more into full consciousness. Finally she realized that it was pointless at this time to continue, and focused her attention elsewhere. <p>

She noticed almost immediately that someone was close by, and that someone had stripped her of weapons and materia. However, the presence near her was not evil - the action had only been done out of caution, not out of malice. She could respect that.

Vincent watched as the woman stirred, heralding her returning wakefulness. With a deep breath, she slowly opened her eyes...revealing startling lavender orbs. Her gaze roamed the cave until they settled on the dark form completely wrapped in a cloak a few feet from her.

He frowned thoughtfully. _Odd...she doesn't seem the least bit disturbed at my...enhancement._ Her eyes held no fear, just a wary sort of curiosity, taking in the blood red eyes, metallic arm, and rather prominent weapon of her rescuer with easy acceptance.

Aloud, he asked, "Are you alright?"

She blinked and raised a hand to rub her temple. "Yes, I'm just fine." Her soft voice had an almost melodic tone to it, though the tone carried a slightly flippant inflection to it. "Where am I, anyway?" The pale haired stranger struggled to sit up, still clutching her head.

Placing his hand on her shoulder, Vincent gently pushed her to lay back down on the pallet. "You shouldn't get up just yet. As for where we are, it is near the village of Nibelheim."

A brief flicker of confusion passed over her face, but was soon hidden. "I see. And what are we doing in a cave?"

"I came here to...say goodbye to someone dear to me."

Her lips curved in a wry smile. "I hope you do not take offense sir, but a cave is not normally a place to be saying ones farewells." He gave a noncommittal sound, so she continued. "Speaking of which sir...what should I call you?"

"Vincent Valentine."

"Valentine..." Something about that word struck a chord within her, but what she couldn't seem to remember...

Hidden beneath the collar of his cloak, Vincent's mouth twisted in wry amusement. "I would prefer to be called Vincent. I am not a holiday."

"Huh? Oh, right..." She mentally shook herself. _I can think about **that** later._ "I guess I have you to thank for helping me, Vincent. My name is Gwyn."

"How did you get here, Gwyn? What happened?"

She gave a helpless laugh, as if she was caught in some sort of cosmic joke. "I honestly don't know. I wish I did..." She closed her eyes to gather her thoughts, to search for any clue as to why she and Charis were ripped from the Lifestream. _So many memories lost...all I can recall clearly is the last battle with JENOVA..._ Gwyn's eyes snapped open. "Vincent, when was JENOVA first discovered?"

He frowned. That was an odd question, but perhaps it would lead to some answers. "It was originally found about five centuries ago. She has recently reappeared, but I think we've defeated her."

Though her face still had the same outward calm, her eyes betrayed her shock. "Then I've lost nearly four hundred years..." she whispered.

Her words were barely audible, but his sharp ears caught her musing. His red eyes widened slightly and he leaned forward. "What?!"

Gwyn's voice was sorrowful. "Indeed. Four hundred years." Somehow, she knew she could trust this dark man, no matter how menacing he might look. She took a deep breath. "If what you say is true, I was born over four hundred years ago..." _Though I've only actually lived twenty-three of them..._

"What is going on?" he asked softly, as if to himself. He looked at the girl. She seemed to be telling him the truth, though he still wanted to get to the bottom of this. But not here. She needed to recover, and she couldn't do that in this cold, damp cave. "No matter. We will discuss it later. For now, we must find some decent shelter...perhaps in Nibelheim."

Vincent carefully helped her rise and exit the cave, assisting her when she had to mount his black Chocobo to ride to town. Gwyn hadn't the faintest idea where this village might be, other than it was nearby. However, a bed sounded good to her, and she needed to find out what had happened while she and her friend were...gone.

* * *

> <p> ...wake up...

Moaning softly, the girl stirred in her sleep. Sephiroth had dozed off slightly, but he awoke at her movement. Just for show, he gently rested one hand on the hilt of Masamune, which was lying across his lap. He studied her again as she woke, noting how she had the instincts of warrior, that even before she fully woke, her hand was on the hilt of her dagger - or where it would have been, had he not removed it. Suddenly, her eyes flew open...and Sephiroth held his breath in shock.

They were Mako eyes. Even in the dark shadows of the room, he could see them. Green, as green as his, and they shimmered and glowed with all the power of the Lifestream - and right now, with fierce anger.

"Who are you? Where am I? What have you done with my weapons?" In anger, she tried to rise, but Sephiroth placed a hand on her shoulder and firmly pushed her back down.

"YOU are in no position to get up. Your weapons are safe. You are in the Northern Crater, far to the north of Icicle Inn and the Gaea Cliffs. As for me..." Sephiroth stood up, his upper body obscured in shadow. "I am Sephiroth." He waited for a response, for her to lash out at him for what he had done. It surprised him when she showed no reaction. He turned, and with a wave of his hand, lit the small sconces on the walls of the room, as well as some candles at the foot of the bed. He then turned back to face the girl. "Now...suppose you tell me who YOU are."

She caught her breath. He was gorgeous. He had unbound his hair, and

it flowed freely to his waist, as long as hers. She also saw that their eyes held the same power, and saw behind those eyes the pain of long years of suffering. "My name..." She closed her eyes and thought. "...Charis."

The name brought a memory, a sudden vision of a silver haired girl appeared in front of her. She appeared to be locked in battle - and then a flash of a sword, and a spray of blood as the other girl fell to her knees in a grotesque mockery of prayer...

Sephiroth drew a quick breath as he realized he was seeing into Charis' vision. He also realized that what he was seeing was not good. She had obviously violently killed someone...very violently. He would have to keep on his toes. He cleared his throat. "Perhaps...I should take you to Midgar with me. There are some old friends expecting my visit."

Charis looked at him in a daze, and nodded.

2. Chapter One

Nightmares of the Soul: Chapter 1

Nightmares of the Soul

A fanfic by Iridal & Kaitou

* * *

> <p> Dreams of Death

That night was bad - the Crater offered another of its beautiful, but deadly, lightning storms. Because of the concentration of Mako power, the lightning turned out in many colors - pinks, greens, reds, and the normal yellow. They were also ten times more deadly if they struck...and more likely to strike than a normal storm.

Sephiroth was lying in his bed. He could not sleep. Thoughts of the next day's journey ran through his mind. He turned onto his side. How can I face them...? Finally, he sat up, the bedsheets falling to his waist. He reached under the edge of the bed and pulled out a worn-looking envelope - not old, just much handled. With shaking hands, he opened it once more.

_Sephiroth -

> There is new danger. The others do not know I am writing this. This new threat is too powerful if we do not have your help. Please come to 7th Heaven in Midgar.
 Tifa Lockheart_

Sephiroth sighed. He could only imagine what it must have taken for Tifa to write him. She had a lot of pride. He remembered meeting her for the first time...the talented martial artist who agreed to take him and his contingent to the Mako reactor...she, in a way, had begun his descent into madness. He shook his head. He couldn't think about that anymore. All he had done for the past two months was think about what he had done. _There is no use living in the past, Sephiroth..._ He looked up in shock...he could have sworn someone just spoke to him.

After several minutes, he knew sleep wasn't going to come to him that night. He got up and decided to check around to make sure everything was in order for the journey ahead.

* * *

> <p> It was about an hour later that he finally reached the bedroom where he had put Charis for the night. He hesitated at the door, wondering if he should go in. Something told him to go in, make sure she was all right. Go... Sephiroth shook his head and looked around. What was going on?!? Finally, he pushed the door open and walked in. A small smile crept onto Sephiroth's lips. He crossed his arms and leaned back against the doorframe, studying the picture before him.

Charis had stretched herself to her full six feet on the floor, one hand resting on her sword. The blanket he had given her was around her waist, revealing her chemise-like sleeping shirt. Her beautiful auburn hair was spread out around her head like a flaming halo, and the back of one hand rested on her forehead. As he watched her, she creased her eyebrows, then shivered a few times. _She must be freezing_, thought Sephiroth. _It is unseasonably cold, even for winter._ He got down on one knee to pull the blanket over her. As he leaned down, he noticed an odd pendant that she wore. He hadn't seen it before. It was a silver chain, very strong looking but beautifully made. Attached to it was a glowing red stone carved into the shape of a sword. Gently picking it up with the tips of his fingers, Sephiroth held it up to the light. The blade was faceted, and sent sparks of multicolored lights all over the room. Looking closer, he noticed that the same dragon and runes carved onto Charis' sword were etched in minute detail here, too. He made up his mind to ask her about it when they started on their trip the next day. He placed the pendant back upon her collarbone, letting the chain pool at each side of her neck.

He reached down to pull up the blanket...but was stopped by a sudden flash of pain as images not of his life forced their way into his mind. Turning quickly to look at Charis, he could tell by the pained expression she wore that it was her nightmare he was seeing. The images bombarded him even stronger than before. Knowing better than to fight them, he just watched...

* * *

> <p> She felt the crunch of snow softly giving way under her boots as she silently crept toward the small encampment. Stopping at the perimeter, she looked around...and saw her...there...THERE...weapons drawn and ready...but she was facing the wrong way. Quietly she walked up behind the unsuspecting girl, drawing her sword as she did so. At the last minute, the target sensed her presence, and tried to turn. Prepared for this, Charis sliced a low shot across the target's abdomen. The other girl's eyes widened in shock as she vainly tried to hold in her inner organs. Slowly, her eyes found the killers...and widened even more, tearing up in disbelief.

_ Charis felt her face turn up into an evil smile as she cupped the other girl's chin in one brown-gloved hand. Slowly circling her, her hand still resting on the other's face, she came to a stop behind her. Leaning over, she whispered into the target's ear..."Good

night..." Placing her sword on the other's neck, she prepared to...but then she felt the glove of her left hand being slowly pulled off...and a hand that was at once cold as death and warm and sticky with blood grasped hers, the blood mingling with the target's tears. Charis paused...she almost remembered...and then smiled as she drew the full length of her sword across the girl's throat and saw the spray of blood arc in a crimson rainbow across the snow._

Charis sat straight up in bed a scream caught in her throat. She fumbled for her sword...and found a hand instead. She tried to jerk away, but was pulled close...close to something very warm. She tried in vain to push against whoever held her, but the arms that encircled her were far too strong. Finally, she stopped struggling and rested her head against the chest of the man who held her. "Again...why did I have to see it again...oh god..."

Sephiroth kept her close against him. He didn't want her to see the look on his face right now. He just held the trembling warrior until sleep claimed her...which was a very long time indeed.

* * *

> <p> The next day, Charis awoke with a headache that she could not believe. Sitting up, she put her hand to her temple - and noticed that she had something clutched tightly in her fist. Opening her hand, she looked at the object inside...and narrowed her eyes in anger. How DARE he come into her ROOM?! Throwing the blankets off, she hastily put her shirt on and stalked out of her room.
<p>

Sephiroth had just finished frying the fish he had caught for their breakfast. He stood up and stretched, forgetting all the aches of the troublesome night out of his body. Suddenly, he found himself thrown against a wall, with a highly upset, half-clad girl pinning his arms behind him.

"What did you THINK you were doing in my ROOM?!?" Charis was practically two inches away from his face, growling the question low in her throat, his hairtie hanging from her hand in front of him.

Sephiroth fumbled for words. _I can't tell her what I saw...she'll know I know..._ Casually, he answered, "I couldn't sleep. Had to get a few last minute things out of the back room. Must've dropped that when I was packing. Good thing I had an extra." Even more casually, as of to let her know who was the stronger, he threw off her hold and walked to the fire. "Want some breakfast?"

Charis stood with her back to him, her hand clenched around the piece of leather. _Does he know?_ She slipped it into a concealed pouch under her shirt, and answered. "No. I am not hungry. I am going to go make sure my weapons are still usable." Without even turning to look at him, she stalked off.

Laughing to himself, Sephiroth sat down and began to eat his breakfast.

* * *

> <p> The ride to Nibelheim was fairly uneventful, allowing the

silver haired stranger to doze as the dark Chocobo ran on to its destination. She watched the passing scenery through half lidded eyes, silently taking in the dark terrain as they passed it. The reticence between the two travelers prompted Vincent to think of what just transpired in the cave. <p>

A woman from four hundred years in the past...and she is brought back from death, he thought. _Somehow, I do not think she's feeding me lies about her origin. But what does this mean?_ He looked down at the woman riding before him on the Chocobo. Although Gwyn didn't say in so many words, her story implied that her life had ended, perhaps quite violently, four centuries ago. _The dead brought back to life...but for what reason?_ It was also evident from talking with her that there were huge gaps in her memory. Vincent needed more answers from her, but not now. He could question her as much as he wished later, after they both rested.

Perhaps the evil of JENOVA was rising once more...if that was the case, his friends in Midgar definitely needed to hear her story. Either way, he would not leave her alone. Gwyn was lost in a world unknown and foreign to her, a world that carried on long after she was gone...an experience Vincent could sympathize with completely. He had thought that making up for the three decades he had lost was irritating, he could only imagine the culture shock she was bound to encounter.

Just as dawn's ruddy light touched the sleepy mountain town of Nibelheim, the travelers arrived. Leaving the suddenly fatigued woman beside the Chocobo, Vincent went to reserve a room at the quaint little inn. They would both get some much needed rest today, and could catch the ferry over to Junon the next night.

After finishing the transaction with the innkeeper, Vincent returned to Gwyn, who was on the verge of falling asleep on her feet. "Gwyn, why don't you go up to the room and rest. It's the first on the left." Nodding her acknowledgement, the young woman stumbled up the stairs.

* * *

> <p> When Vincent had finished settling the bill with the innkeeper and had roamed around the little town on various errands, he returned to the room he had reserved for himself and Gwyn. Quietly opening the door, he entered and beheld the sleeping stranger lying curled in a ball on one of the room's two beds. <p>

She had obviously fallen asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow. In her hand Gwyn clutched a silver clip, her unbound hair coming free of the tight braid she kept it in. She did not get a chance to kick off her boots before dropping off, much less get under the covers. Every so often, a tiny shiver from the chill winter air would go through her slight frame and she'd curl into an even tighter ball.

Chuckling softly to himself, Vincent unclasped his scarlet cloak and moved to lay it over the pale haired woman. _It would not do to have her catch cold before she gets to share her story_, he mused. Just before he could cover her up, he noticed a flash of purple from her throat. Curious now, he leaned over her to see what it was.

There, attached to a silver chain was a carved pendant that looked to be made of materia...purple materia. However, it did not appear to be like any materia **he** had ever seen. It was carved into the sinuous shape of a dragon coiled in the infinity symbol, and it glowed with power. "Something else unknown to add to this mystery woman," Vincent murmured softly.

With a sigh, he stalked back to his side of the room. Taking off his boots and slipping under the covers of his own bed, he fell into a light, restless slumber.

* * *

> <p> A few hours later, they had packed their things onto Sephiroth's two special-bred gold Chocobos and were on their way to Midgar. Sephiroth knew they wouldn't make it there in one day - two at the best. He also knew exactly where they were going to have to stop for the night - and he wasn't happy about it at all. <p>

Charis was focusing more on getting used to riding again. _After all_, she thought, _I haven't ridden in...oh...how long HAS it been?!?_ She did not want to ask Sephiroth - except for the necessary questions and things before leaving, she had not spoken to him since trying to take him down earlier. Finally, she decided that she had to know. "Sephiroth!!" She yelled over the icy wind of the Gaea snowfields. It was the first time she had really looked at him all day - she had been so upset. Now, looking at the dignified swordsman sitting astride a huge chicken-like creature, hair blowing in the wind, was almost too much for her to take. She started to giggle, and tried to stop. Finally, she pulled her Chocobo to a halt and just began to laugh hysterically.

Thinking something had gone wrong - he heard Charis stop behind him - Sephiroth pulled his Chocobo to a stop as well, dismounted, and walked back. He couldn't believe what he saw. Smiling and laughing, she was beautiful. Her eyes, usually so lit by Mako fire, were lit with joy as she laughed uncontrollably. Sephiroth resisted the urge to grin. "What's wrong, Charis?"

She looked up at him and tried to stop laughing. It didn't work. He had a Chocobo feather stuck in his hair. At this, she lost it, cracking up once more. "You...you...hahahha!...you look so undignified..." she said breathlessly, "riding the Chocobo...it's hysterical!!!"

Sephiroth narrowed his eyes. "You think its funny, huh? At least **I** don't wear clothing that looks like it was in style four centuries ago!"

Charis stopped laughing. She looked up at him, the Mako returning to her eyes. She quietly whispered, "What did you just say?" The green fire in her eyes was almost sending out sparks.

Sephiroth couldn't quite understand what had set her off. "I said, your clothing looks like it was the style worn about four hundred years ago." The look of shock on Charis' face astounded him. "What?"

"Four...hundred years...I've lost..."

"Cha..." Sephiroth opened his mouth to question her further, but she quickly mounted the Chocobo and rode off towards Midgar.

* * *

> <p> Gwyn looked up into the face of her dearest friend - one that she had shared so much with...one that she trusted most in the world - and saw nothing but intense rage. Blind hatred clouded her once vibrant green eyes and her face was twisted into a feral grin, a gross mockery of the smiles that once graced it.

_ The broadsword carried by her one time comrade had sliced across her gut, leaving the shocked mage fumbling to hold her innards within. Warm blood pulsed over her fingers as Gwyn tried to stop herself from bleeding. The cut was deep, and the pain cut across her mind like a knife. She could only look up in shock as her friend cupped her face in a mockery of a tender gesture. _

_ The warrior circled behind her, the gloved hand firmly holding her head steady. Leaning down, the scornfully spoken whisper easily reached Gwyn's ears, followed by the steely length of broadsword at her throat. Not knowing how else to reach her lost friend, she reached up her fingers covered in blood and tears to the glove at her chin. The hand holding the blade almost faltered, trembling a split second in indecision, then drew the edge across her exposed neck.

_

_ Gwyn sagged to her knees in pain, her legs giving out on her as they lost strength. Her vision was dimming, losing focus even as her life was ebbing from her body. Her last sight was her horrified opponent looking down at her crumpled form in shock, then turning her own knife against herself...the blade sinking deep into her chest.

_

_ She felt so cold..._

Gwyn awoke to the sound of her own sobbing. She wasn't alone, however. Strong arms gently embraced her, rocking her softly back and forth, giving her the comfort she so desperately needed. Her ear was against a chest, and she could hear a strong, steady heartbeat. The voice belonging to the presence was soft and deep, whispering over and over that it would be all right. It was Vincent.

She took a few steadying breaths to stifle the sobs still bubbling up in her throat. Somehow she felt strangely safe in this man's embrace - she could feel the terror and hopelessness drift away with the last remnants of her nightmare. He didn't ask for her to share the details, just that she'd calm down.

Only when her breathing had evened and her heart rate slowed down did he loosen his hold. Flashing Vincent a weak smile, Gwyn felt around for a cloth or blanket to wipe her tears. Finding one, she wiped away her signs of grief before she realized what she held.

"Vincent, this is your cloak...how did it get here?" She gazed up to hear his answer, allowing her to see his uncovered face for the first time. Her breath caught in wonder. His long ebony hair fell in his face, accenting the handsome features of his pale aristocratic face. Only his eyes held an otherworldly quality to them - even now, they glowed a brilliant crimson.

A faint pink stained his cheeks, evidence that whatever answer he was prepared to give, it embarrassed him. "When I came up to the room earlier, you had fallen asleep on top of the covers. You seemed cold, so I covered you."

She dropped her gaze and fought to control the telltale blush that threatened to spread across her own cheeks. "Oh...thank you Vincent."

He cleared his throat. "Yes, well...it is early afternoon, and if we push the Chocobo, we'll make it to Costa del Sol tonight." Vincent hesitantly withdrew and rose from her bed, crossing back to the window. "From there, we can take a night ferry to the mainland and we'll be in Midgar in a day or two."

Though she gave him a nod, her face betrayed her confusion. _Costa del Sol?_ she thought. _I don't recall any place named that...not that I can remember much of anything else._

Seeing her bewilderment, Vincent gave her a small smile, unaware that it was causing the young woman's heart to pound. "Perhaps we should get ready now. I'd like to continue our journey before it gets any later." He silently added, _Then, if you wish to share with me, I can find out what has terrorized you so much..._

3. Chapter Two

Nightmares of the Soul: Chapter 2

Nightmares of the Soul

A fanfic by Iridal & Kaitou

* * *

> <p> Ghosts in the Dark

Pounding along the mountain paths on the fast black Chocobo, Gwyn had more time to observe her surroundings. Not much had changed in the countryside since she had known it, and if it weren't for the technological wonders she had seen, such as toilets or electric heaters, she would of seriously disbelieved Vincent's assertion that it was several centuries in the future.

I guess some things never change...no matter how long it has existed. Smiling to herself, she almost missed the shape that was rapidly moving to intercept them...a rather large, dangerous shape. "Vincent!! A dragon!!"

"I see it." He cursed softly under his breath. They had no choice but to fight the beast. Although defeating it would be attainable, it wouldn't be that quick to die and would possibly force them to miss the night ferry to Junon. "Let's get this over with."

Both dismounted, leaving Gwyn to guard the frightened Chocobo while Vincent stepped forward to do battle. He produced a curious looking weapon and shot at the beast, tearing huge holes into its hide.

Interesting...however, it'll take forever to win this fight with just Vincent and that strange...whatever! Touching the knife at her belt, Gwyn summoned the power from its equipped materia. Pointing her finger at the attacking dragon, huge bolts of lightning tore through the crystal clear sky, striking it and leaving it howling in pain.

Not one to waste the opportunity, Vincent aimed and fired, killing the foul creature. Twirling his still smoking gun, he noticed his companion's wide-eyed look of absolute amazement, which was riveted on Death Penalty as he held it in his right hand.

"What...****is**** that?!" she asked, pointing.

"This is a gun."

She moved closer to him, her attention flipping from the weapon to its wielder. "A gun? Is it like a...magic crossbow?"

A look of faint embarrassment passed over his face. "Uh...no." Vincent opened the barrel and let her examine the interior. "See? I put bullets, these metal things, in here." As she frowned in thought, he carefully explained how he loaded it and prepared it for firing. "Then, I pull the trigger." Taking quick aim, he shot a blowing leaf some distance away.

Gwyn turned to him, her eyes wide. "Amazing! Can I...try?"

He looked at her a moment, then chuckled softly. "I doubt you'd like it."

Her face quickly changed from wonder to irritation, her eyes darkening until they were a deep purple. "Why? Is it because I'm a woman?"

Vincent raised an eyebrow. It was almost humorous how mercurial her moods were. "No, it's not that. Very well. You asked..." Standing behind her, he helped the young mage place her hands correctly on the gun.

"What should I aim for, Vincent?"

"Something easy." He scanned the countryside, his eyes finally settling on an old hollow tree. "Try that tree. Aim for the trunk." He placed his finger with her own against the trigger, then instructed her to fire.

Her shot wasn't quite dead on, but it did hit the graying tree trunk, debris from the hit billowing out in a tiny cloud. Echoes of the shot reverberated from the surrounding mountains.

Vincent smiled softly at her efforts. "Good job." His mouth was by her ear as he spoke, his breath warm against her exposed skin. It wasn't until then that Gwyn noticed how very close he was standing. His distinct masculine smell surrounded her - a unique blend of his gun's oil and musky smell that was all his own. She could not help but blush, silently cursing herself for her fair skin. Seeing her reaction, he backed away, taking Death Penalty with him.

She flashed him a grin to cover her embarrassment. "I still think it's magic...thank you for letting me try, however."

He gave her a thoughtful look. "Speaking of magic, I couldn't help noticing that you are quite a proficient magic user. That spell you used...I have never seen that kind of power before."

She shrugged nonchalantly. "It's my calling...what I was trained to do."

"I thought that you were a warrior, somehow," Vincent said, gesturing at the knife sheathed on her belt.

Gwyn chuckled, shaking her head in amusement. "No, I am most definitely not a warrior!"

"Then who taught you to use your knives?"

"I...I..." She thought about it for a moment, her gaze taking a faraway look to them. "...Charis. She taught me. I taught her a little magic, and she taught me a little about fighting in return."

Vincent raised an eyebrow. There was something about the way she had named her companion - something that hinted that there was more to the story. A half an hour was a decent price to pay to satisfy his curiosity. Pulling out some travel food that he had bought in town, he sat on the ground and beckoned for her to join him. "Charis?"

"Yes, my friend." Gwyn suddenly looked very uncomfortable. "She and I...died...together."

"Ah. I see." He handed her some food, covertly looking to see her reactions. "Was that who you dreamt of?"

She picked at her food, refusing to meet his gaze. "Yes, she was in the dream..."

"Would you like to tell me, Gwyn?" he asked her gently. "I am an expert on nightmares..."

She gave a small bitter laugh. "Even one such as mine?"

"On all nightmares. Tell me. It helps...a little."

Gwyn gave a resigned sigh, her gaze seemingly focused entirely on the food she held in her hand. "I saw...re-experienced...my death. OUR death." Her gaze shifted to meet his, her eyes mirroring deep pain and sorrow. "Tell me. Have you ever had someone you cared for more than life itself betray you"

His eyes flickered once with some indefinable emotion. "Yes. It was...JENOVA's fault."

"JENOVA," Gwyn spat. "So she continues to disrupt lives other than my own." She lifted up the front of her shirt, just enough to expose her belly. A long, thick scar marred her smooth abdomen, the blemish a pale, silvery color. "I was sliced across here..." Dropping her shirt back over her stomach, she tilted her back to reveal another silvery

mark across her throat. "...and here."

Vincent's eyes betrayed his shock before his gaze averted. "A pity I wasn't there to avenge you." His words were laced with animosity.

"No," she stated firmly. "I do not need avenging. Charis was an innocent, and was forced to pay for the evil wrought upon her soul by JENOVA."

"Oh?"

"She and I were friends...ARE friends. When I lay dying, I saw her - the REAL her - surface. She was...horrificed at what JENOVA had made her do. She..." Gwyn paused, her eyes glimmering with unshed tears. "Instead of letting JENOVA break her like that, she stabbed herself...joining me in oblivion." Wiping her hand across her face, she gave him a tremulous smile, obviously trying to contain her tears. "Well, perhaps we should move on...you said something about wanting to make the ferry before sundown, right?"

She turned from him, thus ending their conversation.

* * *

> <p> They rode in silence, Sephiroth taking the lead again after he had let Charis ride off some of the shock. Dusk fell, and still they rode on. Finally, he reined his Chocobo to a stop, Charis stopping behind him. He scanned the horizon...he knew it was...there. He pointed to a large shell-looking thing about two miles away. "That is where we stop for tonight. The City of the Ancients."

Charis narrowed her eyes. The City of the Ancients...she remembered hearing about it very long ago...from someone she couldn't remember. Shaking her head, she followed Sephiroth's lead to the shining city below.

* * *

> <p> It was midnight when Sephiroth finally decided that Charis was asleep. Silently, he climbed out of his bed, donned his trenchcoat, and made his way toward the large shell at the very heart of the City. <p>

Wearily, Sephiroth descended the stairs leading into the cavern underneath the city. Each step made him remember what he had done. He had killed many people in his time under JENOVA, but this, he believed, was his worst murder. _She was PRAYING..._

* * *

> <p> Back up at the encampment, Charis kept up her façade of sleeping until she was sure Sephiroth was gone. Then she rose, picked up her sword, and headed for the edge of the lake she had glimpsed on the way in. That should be a good spot to train...

* * *

> <p> Sephiroth knelt down on the small dais in the center of the cavern. "Look...I feel kind of stupid being here, because I know that

you can't hear me. But I suppose it is part of my...penance to apo...apo..." <p>

"...apologize," finished a rather...familiar voice behind him. Then came the unmistakable giggle.

Sephiroth turned around, looking extremely undignified. "AE..AERITH?!?" He then noticed something rather odd. Aerith was at eye level with him. Somehow...this didn't feel quite right. Slowly, he looked down at the ground...and noticed she was floating about a foot off of it... "You...You're..."

"Dead, yes. I know." She grinned. "However, the powers that be have determined that you and the rest are FAR too incompetent to deal with this new incarnation of JENOVA...so they kind of sent me back like this to help." She laughed at the expression on his face. "Why Sephy-chan...I have never seen you so perplexed!"

Sephiroth just stared.

* * *

> <p> Two hours later, Sephiroth began the ascent back to the camp. Man...I just spent two hours talking to a...a ghost!? Heh...I must be losing it agai... He stopped. An odd noise had caught his attention. It seemed to come from the shore of the lake, not far from the encampment. Silently, he crept up the stairs and found a small crack in the ancient wall and looked.

It was Charis. She was training, and by the way she was perspiring, it looked as if she had been for awhile. As he watched her swing her sword with the same precise skill he used with Masamune, he marveled. _She really is rather good..._ Then he noticed something strange...no WONDER he originally had thought that she was a man! Charis had bound her chest tightly with strips of cloth. They were white, and besides her normal leather pants, were all she was wearing, having discarded her shirt and vest by the edge of the lake. She still wore her gauntlets and that strange necklace, and her fiery hair was pulled into a loose braid that ran to her waist. She turned, facing Sephiroth's direction, and he pulled slightly away from his vantage point. After a moment, he looked back through the chink in the wall. His eyes widened at what he now saw. Running just above the binding cloths on Charis' chest, just over her left breast, was a scar that looked to be about 5 or 6 inches in length. It looked recent, but..._how could she have survived a stab wound like that!? From the looks of it, it was made by a sword just as big as hers..._ Sephiroth furrowed his brows and refocused his concentration on her sword skills. Her control of such a huge weapon was quite amazing. Even with her height, and though she was strong, such a sword would be hard to maneuver. Yet she wielded it as if it were a toy.

He watched her until she stopped about an hour later. She thrust the swordblade into the soft turf and ran her forearm over her forehead. _That felt good..._ she thought. _I think that was what I needed._ She pulled her sword out, grabbed her clothes, and walked swiftly back to the camp.

Nightmares of the Soul: Chapter 3

Nightmares of the Soul

A fanfic by Iridal & Kaitou

* * *

> <p> The Death of Innocence

Vincent and his newfound charge made the night ferry bound for Junon with minutes to spare. He had just enough time to pay for their tickets in Costa del Sol and stow the Chocobo and their gear before the crew cast the ropes to depart. From there, he led the wide-eyed mage up the gangplank and to the room they were given, intent on waiting out the nightlong sea voyage.

Their room was tiny, with two small rickety cots along the one wall, and a round little porthole that gave them a view of the calm moonlit seas. Neither one was particularly tired, so they settled in to wait out the evening voyage, Vincent in a darkened corner by the door polishing his gun and Gwyn beside the porthole staring captivated at the wind-ruffled waters.

Vincent chuckled softly at his companion's enthralled expression, his silent amusement not unnoticed by the mage. She turned to see him watching her, his lips turned up ever so slightly in a tiny grin. "I take it you've never seen much of the ocean before," he stated, a trace of mirth in his tone.

"No, I've been land bound for all of my life," Gwyn said a bit sheepishly. "I know I must've seen the ocean once or twice before, but I don't think I've ever had the opportunity to cross it."

"You must have been to many interesting places, despite never crossing the ocean." It was a leading statement, he knew - designed to gauge how much of her past she really did recall - but he was curious about the life this mysterious woman once led over four centuries ago.

The silver-haired maiden shook her head ruefully. "Yes, destiny has seen fit to make me a bit of a wanderer...if my life had turned out differently, I might have been a housewife raising a brood of children rather than a mage and mercenary."

Vincent leaned forward, his intense gaze visible from the dim light of the porthole. "Somehow, I can't imagine someone with such inherent power like you being a domestic."

She sighed. "I was anything but extraordinary before my teens...my father was a simple hunter, and my mother the village herbalist. After I hit my teens...well, that was when destiny stepped in, I suppose..."

The dark-clothed man nodded, his gun temporarily forgotten. "What happened?"

"I don't remember...exactly." The mage frowned, her forehead creased slightly with thought as she tried to cast her memory back to that day so long ago. A vision floated up in her mind's eye, so

startlingly vivid that it was like she was reliving it. She was swept up in the vision that she failed to notice Vincent's soft gasp of surprise as her memory intruded upon his mind...

_The interior of the cabin faded to reveal the lush greenery of a healthy forest. A young maiden stepped into view, her lovely face a promise to great beauty in years to come. She held a handmade basket in her arms, filled with plump, juicy raspberries freshly plucked. Her silvery curls, cut to just above the collar of her azure dress, swept back as she turned to call to her companion. _

_ She was so young then...young and carefree. Her step was light and her lavender eyes held a joyful sparkle that looked as if it could never be dimmed. It was as if she was the living embodiment of laughter and joy. Her companion joined her, a girl with hair the color of living flame and green eyes lit with radiant happiness. Though she looked to be only on the threshold of womanhood, she was tall...already taller than her friend. She too carried a basket - this one filled with ripe strawberries - which she leisurely swung in her free hand, the other delicately lifting the hem of her emerald dress above the groundcover. _

_ The younger girl stopped, the dress falling back down as she paused to sniff the air. "Do you smell that? It's...smoke!!" The two exchanged a fearful look, their bright eyes dimming slightly before they took off in a dead run. They sprinted with the quickness of frightened does, baskets forgotten and dresses ripped in their haste. As they came to the edge of the forest, both girls stopped suddenly, as if a wall was thrown up in front of them. They could only stare in shocked incredulity at the smoking devastation that was left of the village they grew up in... _

_ The sheltered innocence of youth gone, the girls' dream selves changed, maturing to grown women. Gone were the images of winsome country maidens...in its place were a hardened warrior, her green eyes lit with fire instead of happiness, and a powerful mage, her faced lined with infinite sadness..._

Vincent shook his head to clear it, the vision dissipating like smoke from his mind. _That girl...it was obviously Gwyn when she was younger and happier._ He frowned slightly. _But how did I see into her vision in the first place?_ Looking up, he finally noticed the mage. Still lost in her memories, she had tears streaming down her face.

"I was about sixteen or seventeen at the time and I was picking berries with a neighbor...with Charis." She sniffled and made a futile attempt to wipe at her still falling tears. "When we left the forest to return to our homes, it was gone...GONE...nothing was left but charred ruins...we were alone..." Covering her face with her hands, she dissolved into heart-wrenching sobs of pure loss.

Lost in her own sorrow, she didn't notice Vincent rise from his seat and approach her. Kneeling beside her, he hesitated only a second before wrapping his arms around her. The mage stiffened for a moment before relaxing into his embrace. He just held her, gently as if she was made of fragile glass, until her sobbing slowed to hiccuping sniffles. Even then, he continued to hold her.

In a very soft voice, hardly above a whisper, he haltingly told her

of **his** past - of his love for Lucrecia, of Hojo's diabolical evil, of the birth of Sephiroth, of his failure to stop the course of events. He told her of the price he was forced to pay for his hesitancy. Vincent knew what he was saying wasn't some happy story to cheer Gwyn up. He didn't mean for it to comfort her like that. No, he shared his tortuous past with her in the hopes that she would realize that their lives were similar in the pain and heartbreak they experienced. She could take comfort in that she wasn't alone.

His calmly spoken words seemed to have an effect. After a few moments, the young mage's breathing slowed as she slipped into an exhausted slumber in his arms. Moving carefully, he shifted her body deeper into his arms and carried her to the wobbly little cot in the corner.

Vincent laid the young woman down and covered her, his gaze lingering for a moment. Although her face was smooth and unlined, it looked so much more careworn than it did in the vision, a testament to the hardships she had endured. She looks so sad...as if she can never find happiness again, he thought, as his fingers strayed to the loose silver curls that escaped from her braid. A kindred spirit..._

Moving slowly, so as not to disturb her rest, he gently pressed his lips to hers, the action as tender and soft as a falling snowflake. Pulling away, he almost smiled as her painful look of limitless sorrow smoothed away for an instant. "We are more alike than it seems..." he whispered. Retreating to his own corner of the room, he sat in the shadows by the door, gazing thoughtfully at the slumbering woman.

* * *

> <p> Charis quietly walked back into the camp, trying not to wake Sephiroth. Silently, she laid her sword by the side of her pallet, within easy reach, and then climbed into bed. <p>

"Welcome back."

Groaning inwardly, Charis rolled over to be face to face with a rather tired-looking Sephiroth. "Why aren't you ASLEEP?" She controlled her voice, keeping it flat despite the fact that this man mesmerized her. Everything intrigued her - his eyes, how they glowed like her own...his hair - gods, she loved his hair; it was like moonlight - ...his...body...she blushed furiously, and was thankful for the darkness.

Softly, as if he were speaking in a church, he asked her, "Where did you go?"

"None of your business. Where did YOU go?"

"That is private!"

Mumbling and muttering, they each turned their backs to one another. A few minutes later, when he hadn't heard her breathing fall into a rhythmic pattern indicating sleep, he spoke once again. "Charis, I...I have to tell you. I was watching you train tonight."

The breathing on the other pallet stopped, then Charis spoke in a

voice he had not heard her ever use. It was a voice filled with pure rage. "You WHAT?"

"It's not like it's that big of a deal. I mean, I've seen lots of women practice; it isn't like you are the most attractive body I've seen. You are the best fighter though. Maybe you should have been born a man, been a true warrior, what do you...think..." He quieted as he realized what he was saying.

"Just shut up will you? I think you have said enough." There was not another word from his companion.

Sephiroth sighed. _I am NEVER going to get the hang of this good guy thing..._ Finally, he spoke. "Look, Charis, sorry about that...I guess I just don't think of you really as a girl. You're the best fighter I've seen...besides myself of course." A derisive snort came from the other pallet. "And it's not like I saw much anyway. Just that scar...how DID you survive that wound? It was right over your heart!"

Chris sighed. "I didn't survive it. Let's just go to sleep, okay?"

Sephiroth did not sleep well that night. A certain ex-flower girl kept yelling in his ear.

* * *

> <p> He had dozed off about midnight or so, but was jerked awake by the now-familiar flood of images into his mind. He spared a quick glance at Charis - she tossing fitfully on her pallet - and then he let the images come to him. <p>

_Charis looked scornfully down at the body of the girl she had just murdered. It had been so simple - the girl really hadn't even put up a fight. Suddenly she shook her head, as if clearing it of a fog...and looked again. Horrified, she dropped to one knee. "Gwyn...GWYN!!!" She pulled her friend's lifeless body into her arms, feeling the still-warm blood flowing over her gloved hands, her red hair reddened further by dropping lock by lock into the growing pool of Gwyn's lifeblood. "Oh God...please wake up...I..." It hit her. "**I** did this...I...how..." _

_ She shook her head as a wave of pain hit her, and put one bloodied hand to her temple, leaving a garish red streak across her pale skin. "Jen...o...va...oh no...ohnononono..." She covered her friend's body with her own, then slowly, set Gwyn down and stood. "I will not let this happen again..."_

You have no choice.

_The words rang in her skull, and she grimaced at the pain, then a bitter smile took over. Picking up her sword, she studied it for a moment before turning it blade first against her skin, barely touching the skin just above her heart. Her eyes took on a determined gleam as she uttered her last words. "Wanna bet?" _

_ With this, she drove the entire length of the broadsword through her body, and against the dying moon, her silhouette was ghastly, the sword's blade entering her heart and protruding from her back. As she

died, she watched her blood pool together with her friend's on the ground, and smiled as her spirit left her..._

Sephiroth pulled out of the dream quickly as his senses told him something was wrong. He heard Charis' breathing become ragged, and the undeniable, slightly screeching noise of a blade being pulled from its sheath.

He pinned her down just before she managed to make the dream real. Her dagger, not her broadsword, was in her hand, so he knelt with one knee on either side of her, his one hand holding her wrists pinned down, the other disarming her and throwing the dagger away. Charis whimpered and writhed under Sephiroth's strong hold, trying to break free. Her hair had come undone and was falling over her face as she struggled, both with Sephiroth and with her memories. It took quite a bit to hold her down, even for Sephiroth - she was very strong, and her adrenalin was making her stronger. He didn't know what to do to get her out of it, short of slapping her, and that he WOULDN'T do. A thought crept into his mind... _No, she'd KILL me..._ He looked down at the tortured girl and suppressed his doubt. She needed to be woken up...

Leaning over, he used his free hand to gently brush the stray hair out of her face...and kissed her softly. It had been many years since Sephiroth had kissed a woman...and even then it was some woman in a brothel that his SOLDIER buddies took him to to celebrate the end of the war with Wutai. For some reason, he had a need, a want to kiss Charis further, more deeply...but that was when he felt her hit him.

Dazed slightly, leaned back and rested his full weight on his knees, looking at Charis, who looked odd - like she was trying to decide whether to be furious, embarrassed, or flattered. He was willing to bet that was the first time she had been kissed. Rubbing his jaw, he spoke in a rueful tone. "Well, nice to see you are feeling better." He moved away from her slightly, grabbing and hiding her dagger in one fluid movement that Charis didn't see.

"What the HELL did you think you were doing?" Her eyes were blazing with all the Mako energy that she held.

"You were having a nightmare of some kind. You didn't look very happy, and I couldn't get you to wake up. I figured if I kissed you...well, then, you'd wake up." Sephiroth smirked. He dodged her punch easily and slid back onto his pallet. "Get some sleep. We'll be in Midgar tomorrow." He laid down and was asleep in a few minutes.

Fuming, Charis curled up under her covers, and then shivered as she remembered her dream. _Did he see...?_ She shuddered, and held her knees to her chest as she forced her tears back. After she had regained control of herself, she opened her eyes...they had a new, gentle look to them as she put her fingers to her lips and smiled softly. Unlike Sephiroth, however, she did not sleep for many hours still...

* * *

> <p> Gwyn awoke to the booming horn of the ferry as it docked in Junon. Blinking away the last vestiges of sleep, she glanced over at

the other cot. The bed hasn't been slept in, she thought; taking in the still neatly folded blankets and unrumpled sheets.

"It seems we have arrived."

She shot a glance over at Vincent where he had been dozing in the corner. _He sat there the entire night?_ Peeking at him from the corner of her eye, she ran her fingers through her hair before methodically rebraiding her long silver locks. "Didn't you sleep?"

He hesitated for a moment, his hand paused in the act of holstering the revolver at his belt. "No, I wasn't tired," he said as he resumed arming himself. "I had some...thinking to do..." He couldn't suppress the nagging little voice at the back of his mind - the one that was smugly reminding him that he spent the entire night thinking about certain young mages and what might have been...

"Oh." She apparently seemed satisfied with his vague answer, for she shrugged before fastening her clip on the tail of her braid. "So, where are we now, and where are we going from here?"

"We're in Junon, a harbor town on the coast of the eastern continent." Vincent stood, patiently waiting as she vainly tried to smooth the wrinkles from her shirt. "There's not much here...unless you're into shipping or military installations." He looked up to see her frown in distaste.

"Uh, no...armies and such are not my style."

"Very well." He smiled softly in answer, then continued. "Once we disembark, we'll ride the Chocobo east, then cut north through the mountains. We should reach Midgar by mid-afternoon."

She stood and followed him to the door, her hand absently fiddling with the amulet at her throat. "Midgar, eh? That should be an..._interesting_ city..."

* * *

> <p> Sephiroth stretched and called to Charis. "Time to get up!" The only response he got was an evil sounding mumble and the covers being pulled over her head. Stifling a laugh, he walked over and knelt by her pallet, shaking her shoulder slightly and dodging the fist that flew at him. "Come on, we have to get moving." <p>

Charis rolled onto her back, groaning at the light filtering through the ceiling. "I hate the morning..." The morning was her least favorite time of day...it reminded her that she was still alive. Sighing, she rolled out of bed and walked to the lakeshore.

Splashing her face with the clear water felt so good. It wasn't too cold...in fact...Charis would KILL for a bath...

"CHARIS! LET'S GET GOING!"

Grumbling, Charis strapped her sword to her back and ran to join Sephiroth.

* * *

> <p> They had been riding for about an hour when Sephiroth noticed Charis searching for something - at first casually, then frantically. He signaled to her to stop, and pulled his own Chocobo to a halt as well. "What's wrong, Charis? <p>

"My dagger...where the HELL is my dagger?!" She kept searching her bags. "That was a gift from Gwyn...where is it!?"

Sephiroth absentmindedly touched his waist, where Charis' dagger rested inside of his coat. "I don't know...did you leave it at the camp?"

Charis ran a hand through her hair. "I don't think so..."

"Well, we have a lot of space to cover today. We can look when we get to Midgar. We don't have the time to stop now." _And the last thing YOU need is another weapon..._ Besides, he kind of liked the feel and weight of the crystal-hilted dagger against his skin. Tugging on the reins of his Chocobo, he stepped a few paces ahead of her, then looked back. "Well, what are you waiting for? Lets go!" He took off in the direction of Midgar at a fast trot.

Charis growled, then spurred her Chocobo up to speed behind him. She felt hot tears spring to her eyes as she thought of losing that dagger...it was the only thing she had left besides her necklace to connect her to her lost friend. Cursing herself, she rode after the man in black.

* * *

> <p> They rode in silence for the next three or so hours, until finally Sephiroth signaled that it was time to stop for the midday meal. Still sullen, Charis removed the cloth from her saddlebags and placed it on the ground as Sephiroth removed the food from his own bags and set it down. Charis removed her sword from her back and placed it on the cloth as well, then she sat down, refusing to meet the eyes of the man sitting across from her. <p>

She reached for the bread, and as she pulled her hand back, Sephiroth caught her around her wrist. She struggled slightly, but she knew that he was stronger than her. Finally looking up and meeting his gaze, she saw not amusement, not dislike, but a deep kind of sympathy. Something in them held her eyes locked to his as he slowly reached his other hand into his jacket...and removed her crystal-hilted dagger. Gently, almost reverently, he placed it in her hand. Fury sprang up in her quickly, but something pushed it back, and she carefully wrapped her hand around the hilt, but Sephiroth did not remove his hand. After a moment of this, he released her wrist and she laid the dagger in front of her, the bread forgotten. She looked down for a brief moment, then quietly asked, "You know, don't you?" She looked up, hoping for a negative answer, but knowing that it would not be so.

Sephiroth was silent for a moment before he spoke. Finally, he sighed, then replied. "I can see your dreams." He didn't miss the pained look on Charis' face, but he continued. "I do not know if it is perhaps the Mako...JENOVA...connection between us, or if it

is...something else. But I can see into your dreams. I will readily admit I do not like what I have seen." His eyes connected with hers once more. "You killed your best friend, didn't you? Under the possession of JENOVA?"

Charis bit her lower lip and nodded. "Last night..."

"I took that dagger from you because you were trying to re-enact the dream upon yourself. I can't keep it from you. It means too much to you." His half-smiled, and said rather awkwardly, "Although I'll admit waking you up was fun."

Charis stared at him incredulously, then burst into laughter, true unadulterated or bitter laughter. After her giggles had subsided, she looked back up at the man across from her, and once again felt like she was being pulled into the green pools that were his eyes. "You are wondering how I survived, aren't you?"

Sephiroth nodded slightly. "I mean, when you were...I mean when I was watching you train last night, I saw the scar on your chest. And when you dreamt last night, I saw..." Sephiroth stopped. He didn't want her reliving it anymore than she had to. "Anyway, how could one survive such an injury?"

With a bittersweet smile, Charis simply said, "I didn't." Sephiroth opened his mouth to speak again, but was stopped by the sight of Charis shrugging her vest off and untying the strings that held the front of her shirt closed. When it was open, she pulled it off as well, revealing her bindings and the scar. She took a deep breath and pulled down the bandages over her chest a little to reveal the scar. "This is the reminder I have of what I did. I killed the only person who had cared about me, and killing myself came...too late." She looked down at the ground until she had suppressed the tears in her eyes.

Wordlessly, Sephiroth stood, and walked around behind Charis. He remembered the silhouette from her dream, and winced as he saw the matching exit wound just to the side of her left shoulderblade. Charis hadn't even realized he was there until she felt her shirt being pulled back on her. She tied the strings, and put her vest back on. She turned to face him, and opened her mouth to speak, but something intruded upon her senses.

She whipped her head around and scanned the forest, as Sephiroth did the same. Bending her knees slightly, she retrieved her sword and drew it from its sheath. Sephiroth picked up Masamune. "It probably is just a bunch of wolves, Charis. They'll be fairly easy to get rid..." He was silenced as he saw the look on her face. She looked so alive, grinning fiercely and assuming a battle stance.

All of a sudden, from the undergrowth, a huge Vlakadoros appeared, it's eyes flashing murderously and muscles tensed for battle. Before Sephiroth could tell her to wait, that that was a VERY dangerous creature, Charis was gone.

Sword cocked to one side, both hands gripping the hilt, Charis ran towards the creature, HER eyes flashing absolute fierce enjoyment. All Sephiroth could do was watch in amazement as she challenged the beast alone - and won. By the time the battle was over, Charis was very bloodied, but most of it was not her own. She wiped the sweat

from her forehead with her gauntlet, and kicked the carcass of the Vlakodoros. "THAT is what you get for interrupting my lunch!!"

Knowing not what else to do, Sephiroth stared at her, and she met his gaze evenly. "Well..." He said, clearing his throat and sheathing Masamune. "Guess there's no compromising with monsters when it comes to you, huh?"

Charis grinned. "Nope. Now how about that lunch?"

5. Chapter Four

Nightmares of the Soul: Chapter 4

Nightmares of the Soul

A fanfic by Iridal & Kaitou

* * *

> <p> A Meeting of Kindred Spirits

The sky was long-since dark by the time Sephiroth and his unlikely companion reached the outer gates of Midgar. They were weary and dusty, but both had felt the need to press on and reach Midgar that night. It was almost as if something was calling them...

* * *

> <p> Tifa slammed the glass down on the bar inside Seventh Heaven, startling everyone. "I can't take it anymore! JENOVA is back, and all we are doing is sitting on our butts waiting for her to destroy everything!" <p>

Cid frowned. "Woman, the *&^% Dukes of Hazzard is on. Be quiet."

"No Cid!!! I will NOT be quiet!!!!" Tifa paced. "Vincent has been gone for days, not a word from him. He is KEY to beating JENOVA!"

Cloud looked up from his glass. "Well, dear, he'll be back. He always is."

Tifa rested her elbows on the bar. "I know, but..."

Barret finally spoke up. "Woman, be quiet! As soon as this crap Dukes of Hazzard is over, the A-team is comin' on! Mr. T is so ^*&%(cool!"

Tifa clenched her fists angrily, and would have again spoken out, but she felt Cloud's arms wrap around her. Unseen to Tifa, he had crossed behind her, and now began whispering in her ear. "Darling, our tempers are all on edge. Everything will be fine, you'll see. Vincent will come home soon, and we will beat JENOVA as we have once before." Tilting his head downward slightly, he lightly kissed her neck. "So don't worry, I'm sure he'll..."

"VINCENT!" Tifa broke free of Cloud and ran towards the door, where the tall, dark man had just entered. She opened her mouth to begin barraging him with questions...but then she saw the girl right behind him. Moving aside, Vincent gently took the silver-haired woman by the arm and pulled her into 7th Heaven.

* * *

> <p> Ever since the Meteor Crisis had almost knocked ShinRa out of power, the gates to the outside world were always closed, but were never locked. A lone ShinRa soldier was standing guard, but was under no orders to stop any entrants. <p>

Suddenly, as the two figures swept across his monitor, the soldier sat bolt upright in his chair. _It couldn't be..._ His hands trembling, he picked up the phone and pressed 9, the number to call ShinRa headquarters in the heart of Midgar. After he had finished telling the first operator what he'd seen, she transferred him to another, who then transferred him to some executive or another, who finally transferred him higher. MUCH higher.

"H...hello?"

"Who is this? Name, rank, and station please."

"Gestalt, sir. Leo Gestalt. Sergeant. Station is Sector 7 Gateway."

"Fine, Gestalt. Hold on one minute." There was some scuffling in the background and voices Gestalt could not hear. Then, that voice came back on the line. "Ok, Gestalt. Tell me what you saw."

"Sir, could I please know whom I am speaking with? This is classified..."

A sudden burst of laughter followed. "You mean to tell me, you don't know who this IS?!"

Gestalt faltered. "I..I..."

"This is President Rufus Shinra."

"Oh gods! Yessir! I mean...what I saw sir, was this: A man fitting the description of Sephiroth entered the Sector 7 gates not more than 5 minutes ago, sir. He was accompanied by a young man."

"Young man? Give me a description."

"Well sir, from what I could see, the guy was about six foot, well-built, carrying a rather large sword. Looked pretty powerful. Red hair."

"Good, Gestalt. Where did they look like they were heading?"

"Well...the direction they headed would take them to the 7th Heaven bar, in the heart of Sector 7."

"Alright Gestalt. Good work tonight. Hey, when is your relief due in?"

"Umm..." Gestalt checked his watch. "Should be, 5-6 minutes."

"Good. Plenty of time. Goodbye, Gestalt." The phone line went dead.

Gestalt hung up the phone and collapsed into his chair. "Fresh air...that's what I need, some fresh air." He stood slowly and walked outside, leaning on the guardrail. Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by a rather husky male voice.

"Sergeant Gestalt? We need to speak with you. Inside."

Without turning, Gestalt said, "Not possible. On duty..." Suddenly his head was yanked back and he was pulled into his guardhouse, the door locking behind them. Groggily opening his eyes, he saw not one, but four pairs of feet. He looked up. "Holy...you're the...the..." A blow to the back of the neck silenced him forever.

The redhead smiled wanly. "The Turks."

The man with the long black hair turned toward the door, pausing long enough to speak once more to his comrades. "Come on, guys. Contrary to popular belief, it looks like the Turks are going to heaven."

* * *

> <p> Tifa stepped forward and offered her hand. "Hi, I'm Tifa Lockheart. Nice to meet you." <p>

Gwyn hesitated slightly, then took Tifa's hand. "I'm...very pleased to meet you." Her eyes surveyed the other woman's less...discreet clothing. _My...women sure have become more forward in the past centuries..._

Vincent suppressed a small smile when he saw Gwyn's gaze sweep over Tifa's outfit. "Come, Gwyn...let me introduce you to my other friends." As they were introduced, each person smiled at Gwyn. "This is Cid, Barret, Yuffie - don't let her NEAR your materia - Cloud, and Red XIII, but his real name is..."

Gwyn cut him off in mid-sentence as she dropped to one knee. "Nanaki. I never got the chance to know you, but I was there when your mother found out she was carrying you. I am honored to know you."

Red XIII looked at Gwyn strangely for a moment, then seemed to understand. "You are one of the two human girls who protected Cosmo Canyon. Legend said you had disappeared after one of you betrayed us by attacking Bugenhagen, who was being protected by my father, Seto. She left after a draw and the other followed. Which are you?"

Gwyn smiled softly. "I was the follower. My friend Charis was the offender - but...it was not her doing."

Red XIII nodded. "Yes, we know that now. Is she also returned to the world?"

Gwyn winced. "I do not know. I wish I did."

Tifa, sensing the rising tension, interrupted. "Would anyone like some...." She was interrupted by a soft **wark** outside the door and the muffled thud of footsteps approaching the entry. _Is he here already...?_ Gwyn, seeing the slightly expectant and guarded looks and following their line of sight, spun around as well.

There in the doorway stood a man. He was tall - taller than even Vincent - and had the lean, muscular build of a warrior, she noted. His hair was very long, and the same argent shade as her own; a brilliant color that was quite rare in her own time, if not unique. His bright green eyes scanned the group, reflecting both an unspoken challenge and a wary cautiousness, as if he expected to be either welcomed or attacked with equal likelihood.

It wasn't the expression in his eyes that caught her attention, however - it was the color. His verdant green eyes _glowed...even brighter than the shining azure eyes of the silent blond fellow that stood so close to their hostess. _A sure sign of JENOVA's touch_, she mused. _Is her reach so widespread in this time that I find not one, but three individuals with her mark upon them?_

The tall warrior's formidable gaze was unwavering, meeting everyone's questioning or grim look fearlessly. A few in the room frowned, not even bothering to mask the suspicion they obviously felt...Vincent's expression was indiscernible.

Seeing that he was more or less welcome, he stepped aside to let his tall companion enter the bar...a person that, despite the layers of dun colored clothing, Gwyn readily recognized. "C-charis? Is it truly you?!"

The stranger froze. Pushing back the layers of scarves, the stranger uncovered a woman's face - a face wide-eyed in shock and disbelief at who was standing before her. "Oh gods...Gwyn..." She stepped forward and grabbed the mage into a bear hug. "Yes...yes, of course it's me!"

The two fiercely hugged for a moment or two, the tall lady warrior not noticing the large cat-like beast sprawled nearby. That is, until she happened to glance over her friend's shoulder and saw the red furred creature looking at her curiously...a creature whose race she knew all too well. Charis gasped and drew back from the mage, the facial expression one of equal parts shock and remorse. She visibly recoiled as Red rose to his feet and solemnly approached her.

"You needn't fear me, Charis..." he said as he crouched down on his haunches in front of her. "Or the anger of myself and the Canyon. We suspected possession afterwards, when we had time to further ponder the occurrence, and your companion has vouched for you. Together, this proves to me that you are quite innocent..."

Charis stopped her retreat, but a frown crept across her features and her gaze dropped to the floor. "I may be forgiven by Gwyn...and forgiven by everyone else I've ever hurt...but I can never forgive myself." Her voice was very quiet, filled with deep pain and a self-loathing that seemed to grow by the second. "And I'm anything but innocent. I have too much blood on my hands to ever bear that description again..."

The mage standing beside her frowned. "He's right, you know. It was

****not**** your fault...it was all JENOVA."

It seemed she was about to object further, but the scantily dressed barkeep, Tifa, smoothly interjected. "Which is why we're all here, Charis. To defeat her once again and make sure what happened to you - to ALL of us - will never happen again." She gestured to the others in the bar, who had been watching with a quiet yet piercing sort of curiosity. "All of us here have had our lives screwed up and changed by JENOVA...especially Sephiroth." Tifa nodded in the direction of the tall silver-haired warrior who had entered with Charis. Sephiroth scowled at the reference, but chose not to comment on it.

During the entire exchange, Vincent stood quietly in the corner, focusing his thoughts on the real issue...the one that prompted former enemies to join as allies. AVALANCHE had defeated the evil entity in her final - and most deadly - incarnation, or had they? "Tifa, why do you believe that JENOVA has revived?"

Yuffie, who had remained silent during the conversation and instead fiddled with a materia, spoke up. "'Cause that's what the Turks think. Or at least that's what Reno said."

One of Vincent's slender black eyebrows disappeared into his crimson bandana. "_Reno_ told you this?"

Her mouth curved into a slight smirk at that. "Not by choice. I hadn't seen him in his usual dives around Midgar or the ShinRa building for a few days, and he said he was off on official Turk business." Yuffie's smirk fell from her face and she sighed. "He slipped up and mentioned how he and Rude investigating possible JENOVA-type occurrences. Something about Mako fluctuations..."

"The ShinRa have been keeping an eye on anything related to the whole Meteor incident," Cloud said. "If anyone would know first, it would be the Turks." It was obvious that Cloud was upset at the news. JENOVA and those under her influence had caused him a lot of pain and mental duress, and he wasn't about to let that happen again.

"I think that these 'Turk' fellows might be correct in their assumption," Gwyn said hesitantly. "Just the simple fact that Charis and I are here is evidence of her return. "I don't think our lives would have been restored otherwise, and I doubt the Lifestream would release our souls unless she was truly gone."

Tifa scanned the room, noting that her companions' expressions seemed collectively grim and dour. _No, this is definitely ****not**** good news._ Her gaze finally settled on Sephiroth. His face was not its normal haughty appearance, but had a bleak aspect not seen on him before. _Could it be...fear?_ "Sephiroth, what about at the Crater? Have you seen any signs of JENOVA?"

"Yes..." The great general frowned a bit, as his wary sense of caution kicked in at the sight of so many of his former 'enemies' turning their direct attention to him. _No matter how long we are allies, it will be an eternity before we can trust one another._ "Dozens of little signs, almost unnoticeable to most, have begun to spring up there...even shortly after her defeat. Creatures that were created from her power and that should have died with her have become almost prolific there. And sometimes...I can feel her at the very brink of my consciousness...not as powerful or overwhelming as

before, but the tiniest pull at the edge of my awareness, like catching a glimpse of something out of your peripheral vision."

"Goddammit!!" Cid swore from a barstool near the wall. "That #\$@*(! headless freak is runnin' around loose again!"

Red gave a tolerant smile to his grizzled friend. "We're just assuming that. It could just be mere coincidence..."

"Not likely," Vincent said humorlessly. "We would be fools to not investigate and just hope that nothing's wrong. All signs seem to be pointing to JENOVA's existence."

The pilot bit down on his cigarette stub angrily. "Well what the hell do we do now!?!"

"We defeat her, of course. This time for good."

The smooth sounding voice had come from a man standing in the doorway. His expensive white designer suit was immaculate, from his heavy outer coat and the waist length jacket to his crisp white pants, and he arrogantly flipped back the errant strands of stylishly cut blond hair that hung in his eyes. Three men and a woman gathered around him, all outfitted in neatly pressed blue suits...or at least three of them did. The cocky red head by his left shoulder had a slouching, rumpled look.

Barret stomped forward. "Rufus! What do you an' your \$@(!\$@ Turks want, foo'?!"

Yuffie meanwhile stalked over to the disheveled man. "Reno!! What are you and the other goons doing here!? This meeting is PRIVATE!" She reached out her hand and hit him upside the head.

"OW!! What'd you do THAT for?!"

"Because you're an idiot!"

"Stupid brat."

Rufus rolled his eyes and stepped forward, ignoring the pair as they bickered by the door. "We came to help. I believe you are going to need it."

"We don't need your goddamn help, pretty boy!!" the large man growled.

"Barret!! Stop it," Tifa admonished. "We need all the help we can get, and the Turks have access to all sorts of info from the world over!"

He crossed his arms and frowned. She could easily kick his ass if she got angry enough, but there was no way he could back down without losing face in front of the ShinRa. "Why the hell does he care **anyway**?" He returned his suspicious look back to the blond executive.

Rufus' brazen smirk wavered and the confident gaze lowered. "Last time I fought for my company, but that means nothing to me now. Let's

just say I have something better to fight for now..."

End
file.